IRMA STERN MUSEUM, CT

Opened 1972

This museum, formerly the home of the artist, Irma Stern*, is a showcase not only for a range of her own works, but also for her outstanding private collection of art treasures, garnered from many quarters of Africa and Europe.

The museum owes its existence to the generosity of the artist, whose will instructed that almost her entire estate be kept in trust for the promotion and encouragement of art in SA. Soon after the terms of the will became known, the Trustees received an offer from the Council of the Univ of CT of a site on campus on which to build a home for the collections. However, at a meeting of Trustees on 10 January 1967, it was unanimously decided that Irma Stern's own Rosebank home, 'The Firs', should be preserved for the purpose. The house was offered to the Univ of CT at a nominal fee, on the understanding that the Univ would house the collections on the premises in perpetuity, would be solely responsible for maintenance and upkeep of building and contents and, with the assistance of an annual grant from the Trustees, would administer 'The Firs' as a public museum and gallery.

The property was transferred to the Univ in August 1969. Meanwhile a committee of art experts had assisted the Trustees in selecting from the works left in the house those items from Irma Stern's own oeuvre which were to be retained in the permanent collection. Another committee investigated the restoration, reconstruction and extensions necessary to adapt the home to its new function as a permanent museum.

The alterations were tastefully and skilfully effected. The original entrance, through a carved Zanzibar doorway, was closed and the door retained for exhibition only. Access to the museum is through a new wing constructed on the site of the former outbuildings. Irma Stern's studio, with her working tools, furnishings and easel, has been preserved intact and very little of the character and atmosphere of the house has been lost in rearranging the interior decor for more effective display of the collections. In addition to a representative range of paintings in oil and gouache, drawings, prints, sculpture and ceramics by Irma Stern, the exhibits include valuable collections of carvings, pottery, basketry, raffia mats and textiles from N, Central, W and E Africa; Pre-Columbian artefacts; Eastern and Middle Eastern artefacts; early European works of art; furniture and objets d'art from many other periods and places.

A well-illustrated catalogue was published when the museum was opened; and various leaflets and brochures are available. Generous provision in the artist's will allows for continuing development and growth of the institution and its contents. The Irma Stern Museum is administered by the Univ of Cape Town and directed by the Head of its Dept of Fine Art. Director since inception: Prof Neville Dubow.

JAROSZYNSKA Karin

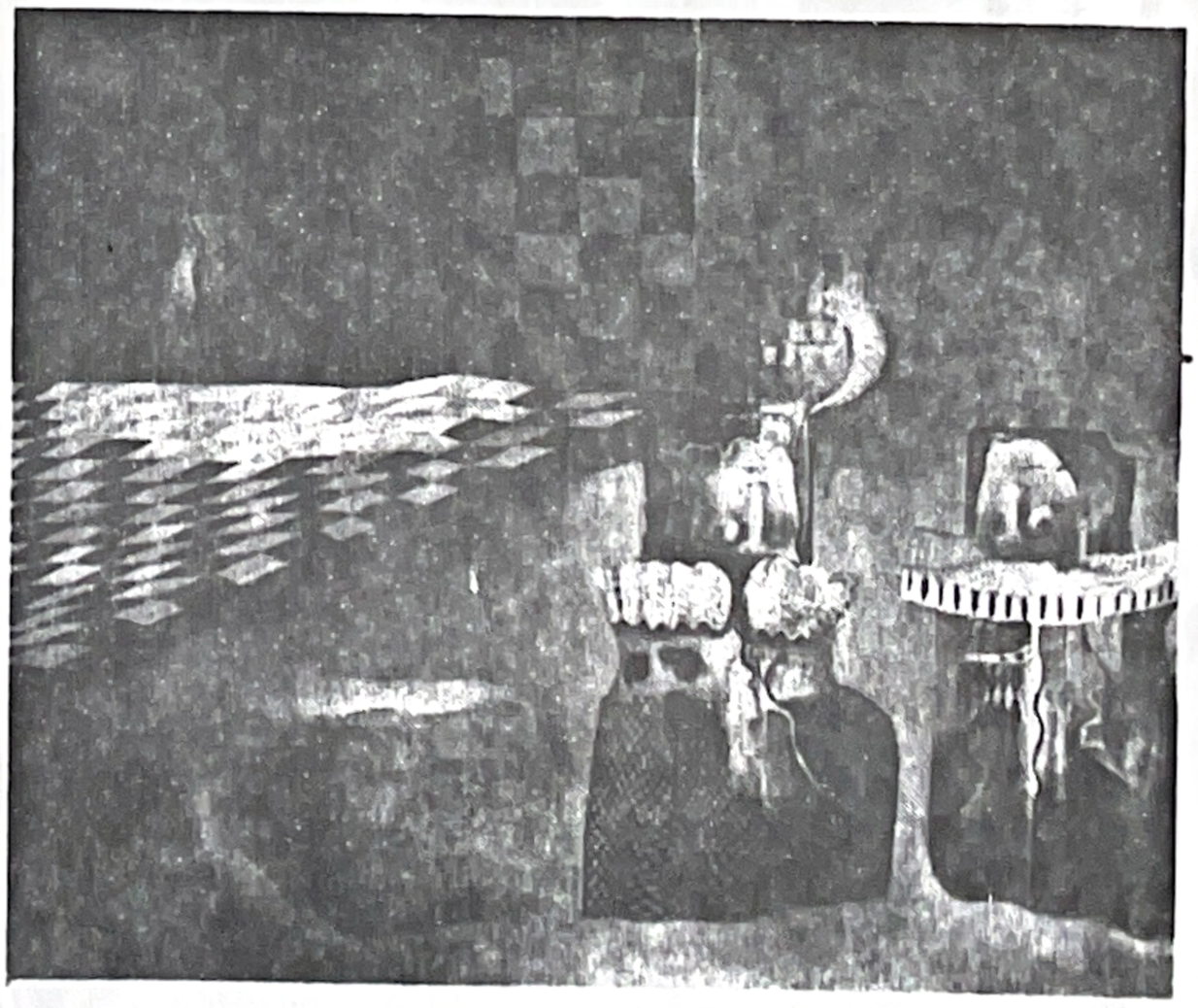
1934

b Helsinki, Finland

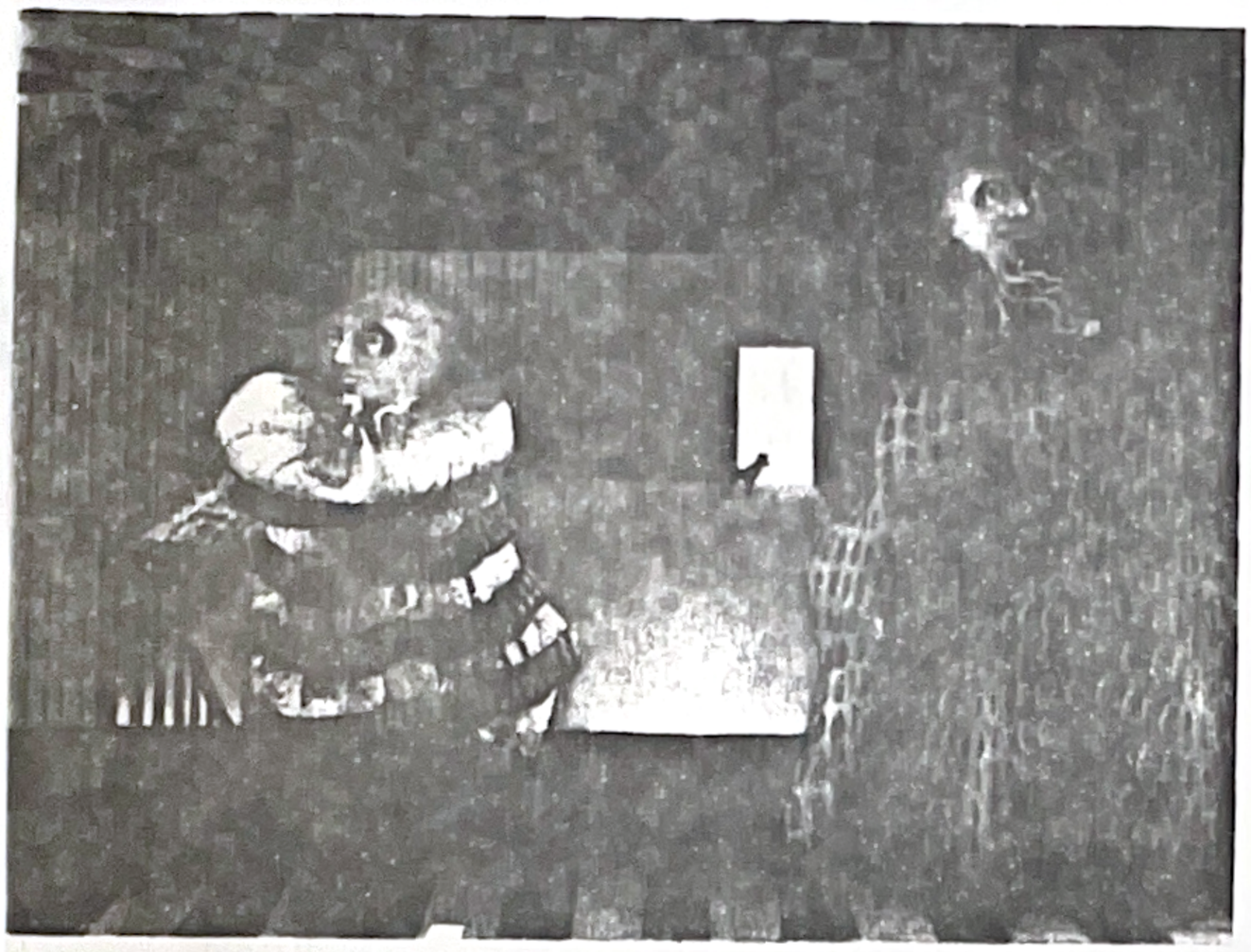
STUDIED 1951–56: Finnish Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki.

SUMMARY BIOGRAPHY Grew up in Finland; both her father and grandfather were artists, her mother a pianist. 1954: married Tadeusz Jaroszynski*, a fellow-student at the Academy. 1957: returned with her husband to SA, settled in Jhb. 1957–72: a supportive wife and mother; for several years she allowed herself very little time for her own creative work, did not hold a one-man exhibition until 1965; conducted a teaching studio for children in her home. Early works exhibited were mainly studies in ink and wash; later began working in tempera and mixed media. 1973: first clear evidence of the distinctive personal iconography that was to crystallize over the next few years. 1974: four months concentrated work in Finland with Tadeusz, mainly etching. Upon their return, Gal 21, Jhb, published joint portfolio of etchings, 'The Helsinki Series' – temporary similarity of surrealistic imagery and styles; (that series was followed in 1976 by another joint portfolio, 'The Johannesburg Series'); the graphics attracted attention in Europe as well as SA. Husband and wife subsequently resumed development along individual lines; Karin embarked on a series of large-scale oil compositions, metaphysical in character, original in subjectmatter. 1977: with their children older and no longer fully dependent, the couple departed for Sweden, where Karin's sister had offered them a home; intended staying two years. 1978: a visit to their daughter in France resulted in commencement of association with Romanet Gal, Paris; moved to France, settled in an 11th Century monastery on an estate in Loire Valley. 1980: first Paris one-man exhib. 1981: visited SA.

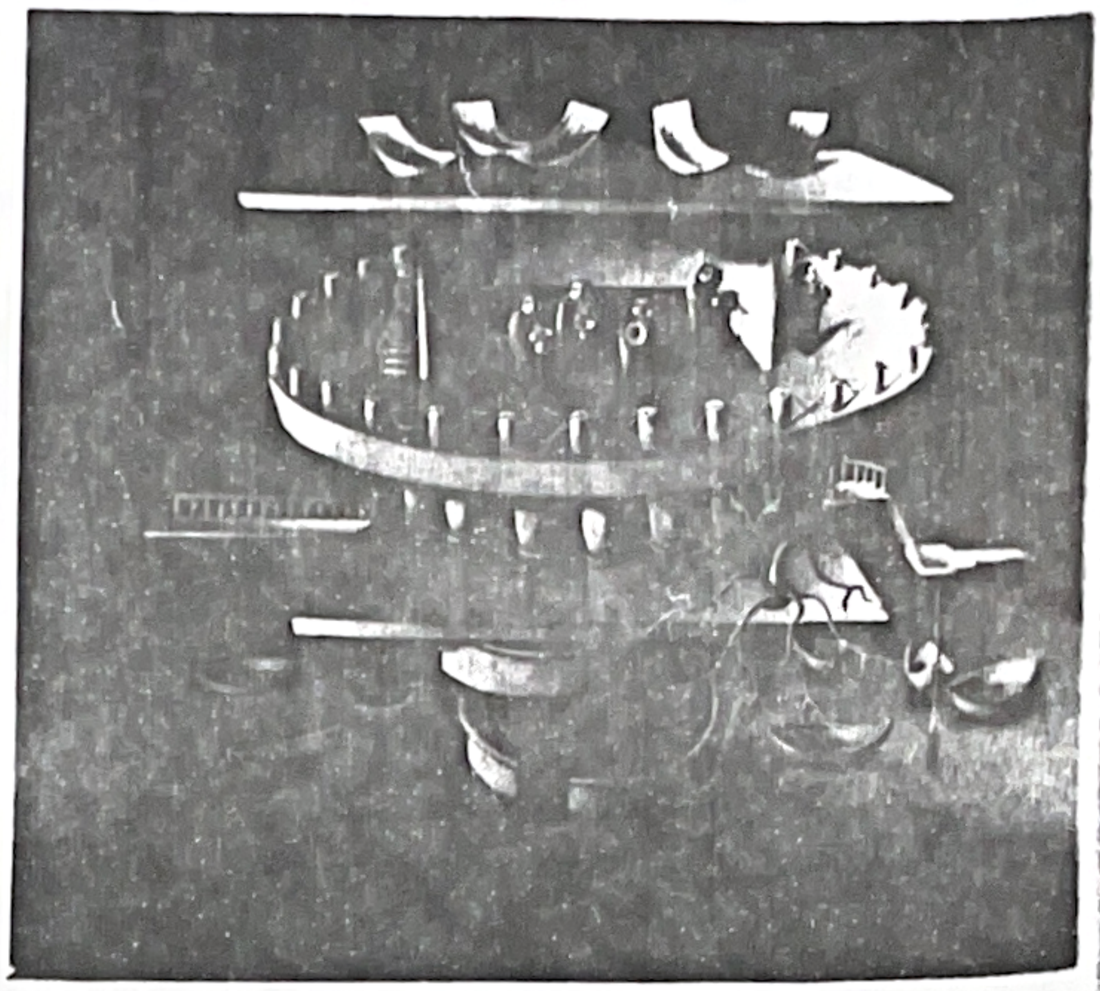
EXHIBITIONS 1965: first one-man exhibs, Jhb, Helsinki; (after 1971, fairly regular one-man exhibs in SA). 1971: Triennale, Helsinki. 1974: Royal Acad, London; 3rd International Gr Bien, Frechen, W Germany; 1st Internat Gr Bien, Segovia, Spain. 1975: 11th Internat Gr Bien, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia. 1976: various Internat Gr Biennali in Europe. 1979: XIII[e]



JAROSZYNSKA Karin *Upside down* 1974 Oil 150 x 180 Wits.



JAROSZYNSKA Karin *The arrival* 1975 Oil
126 x 174 Haenggi Foundation, Jhb.



JAROSZYNSKA Karin *Midsummer night* 1976 Oil
137 x 152 PC.

Grand Prix de Monte Carlo; 'SA Printmakers', SA Nat Gal, CT. 1980: first one-man exhib, Galerie Romanet, Paris. 1981: New York Art Exposition.

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS Jhb Art Gal; SA Nat Gal, CT; Pta Art Mus; Sandton Munic Collec; Pietersburg Collec; Univ of Wits; various European collections.

The first public evidence of Karin JAROSZYNSKA's obvious abilities came to light in a few diffident entries to group exhibitions early in the 1960s. Those exhibits were confined mainly to slight works on paper, studies in pen-and-ink with washes; but they proclaimed a very sure hand and eye and hinted at an unusual personal vision.

Even after her first one-man exhibition at Gallery 101 in Jhb in 1965, she continued to maintain a low profile; and when the limelight began to fall upon the achievements of her husband, Tadeusz, she made no attempt to share it. But from the time of her third exhibition at the Lidchi Gallery in 1971, it was clear that hers was a talent that could not be ignored.

Always in Karin Jaroszynska's expression, it is humanity that occupies the centre stage. In the paintings of 1972 she introduced 'near human' figures into a metaphysical environment, which emphasized their isolation and their anonymity. There was a strange mystical intensity about those images; and although situations were suggested rather than defined and colouring was restrained, even subdued, the compositions were fraught with drama.

But the distinctive artistic personality and the very private world of Karin Jaroszynska were only illuminated fully for the first time in the mixed media works of 1973.

That year saw the commencement of the phase of 'chessboard metaphysics' — a series of works dominated by the black-white checquer-board device, which recurred in a variety of formal and pictorial roles. It wâs as if a community of conventionalized chess-pieces had assumed hallucinatory life and, adapting their checquered field variously to the requirements of costume, props and setting, had acted out a sequence of surreal charades, at which they had been apprehended by the observant artist.

Those evocative images became the seminal source of Jaroszynska's later, mature iconography. For the moment, however, she was fascinated more by the metaphysical possibilities of the situations that she was creating; and, for the next few years, her output was patently surrealistic in orientation. Indeed, both husband and wife were carried on a wave of surrealist invention and their joint portfolios of etchings, produced in 1974 and 76, showed close affinities of style.

The symbiotic creativity was but a temporary phase, however. From the mid-Seventies, both artists resumed development along independent lines. Karin Jaroszynska began to extend the iconographical boundaries of the intimate and curious world she had created. In a fascinating range of large oil canvases she gave form to a unique community of mirror-image men and women, cloned from some doe-eyed, large-nosed, low-browed prototype of her remembering or dreaming. These silent, listening figures inhabit their own time and space, ambiguous and remote from the here and now, alluding to a Mediaeval origin and yet unlike any actual Mediaeval scenes or images one can recall.

Karin Jaroszynska has always been absorbed by what she calls 'old art'; and undoubtedly her artistic vision has been influenced by residual impressions of Mediaeval painting and memories from childhood of Scandanavian folk art. However, there are distinct affinities between the ambiguous reality of the world within her compositions and Tolkien's literary creation, 'Middle Earth'. For the artist is not simply making use of a traditional style; nor is she merely fabricating romantic narratives about a departed era. Form and content are completely congruent. These personages, who could indeed be Hobbits, are not illustrations: they actually exist within the complex internal space and resonant atmosphere that she carves out.

Jaroszynska has conceived an alternative people, like but unlike those we know. She has devised an

ambiguous internal space — sometimes behind the space behind the picture-plane — and has constructed edifices within that space that frequently defy the laws of physics. She conjures up musicians, playing silently on instruments that have not been invented. And she suspends the meditative moments in a time that never was.

There are resemblances in Jaroszynska's projection of reality to the more astringent existentialism of Balthus; there are allusions to the architectural and spatial ambiguities of Maurits Escher. But, essentially, both style and iconography are the product of a personal creative vision — the unusual and haunting world of Karin Jaroszynska.